

## 3.8 SOCIOECONOMICS

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Section 3.8.1 provides a discussion of baseline social and economic conditions for the Proposed Project and alternatives. The potential environmental consequences of developing the Proposed Project or alternatives, including those associated with environmental justice are considered in Section 3.8.2. Potential socioeconomic impacts are evaluated for construction and operational phases.

### 3.8.1 Affected Environment

The Proposed Project is located in eastern Riverside and Imperial Counties in Southern California. The Proposed Project and Alternatives A and C transmission line routes would begin at the proposed new substation/switching station on Hobsonway, approximately 4.5 miles west of the City of Blythe (Blythe) in Riverside County, California. They would continue west approximately 118 miles along I-10, ending at the Devers Substation in the Coachella Valley north of Palm Springs, California. The Alternative B transmission line route would run southwest from the new substation/switching station on Hobsonway into Imperial County, following an existing 161-kV transmission line and SR-78 to the community of Glamis, California, and then proceed northwest to the Midway Substation near Niland, California. Alternative B also includes an upgrade of an existing transmission line from the existing Coachella Substation to the Devers Substation. The BLM manages the majority of the land in the project area, though portions of them are under private, state, and tribal ownership.

The socioeconomic impact analysis along the Proposed Project and alternative alignments focuses on population centers located near the eastern and western ends of the transmission line, and the two counties in which the Proposed Project would be located. Affected communities would include Blythe and various communities in the Coachella Valley. Incorporated cities in the vicinity of the project include Blythe, Indio, Coachella and Thousand Palms. For policy and planning purposes, Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) has established the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) subregion that comprises the local governments of the Coachella Valley and the City of Blythe. The Proposed Project and alternatives would also pass through two parcels of tribal lands owned by the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. When available, data specific to the CVAG subregion and the Native American Tribes are presented to supplement state and county data in this analysis.

Population, housing and economic data were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, the SCAG, CVAG, and Riverside and Imperial Counties.

#### 3.8.1.1 Population

According to 2000 Census data, California had the largest population increase of all fifty states, increasing by 13.8 percent or almost four million people since 1990. As a result, California's 33.9 million residents make it the most populous state in the country and account for 12 percent of the nation's total population. Projections estimate that by the year 2020 California's population will reach over 45 million (Employment Development Department [EDD] 2001).

In Riverside County, 2000 Census data records the population at 1.5 million, an increase of 32 percent or 375,000 persons over 1990 Census data (EDD 2001). Table 3.8-1 shows historic population estimates and future population projections for different geographic areas. Overall, Riverside County is the sixth-highest populated county in California. Its population is projected to reach more than 2.8 million by the year 2020.

<b>Table 3.8-1 Historic and Current Population in the Project Area</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>Historical Population<sup>a</sup></b>		
	<b>1980<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>1990<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>2000</b>
Riverside County	663,166	1,170,413	1,577,700 <sup>b</sup>
Imperial County	92,110	109,303	149,000 <sup>b</sup>
Blythe	6,805	8,428	20,310 <sup>b</sup>
Niland	1,042	1,183	1,143 <sup>c</sup>

Source <sup>a</sup> Department of Finance (DOF)

<sup>b</sup> DOF 2000

<sup>c</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

The Palo Verde Valley (which includes portions of Riverside and Imperial counties) is located along the Colorado River at the California-Arizona state line. The Valley's great climate with more than 350 days of sunshine and mild winters attracts thousands of winter visitors every year (Palo Verde Valley Economic Partnership 2000).

The population within Blythe was estimated by the DOF to be approximately 20,951 in 2001, including over 8,000 inmates housed at the recently completed Ironwood and Chuckwalla Valley State Prisons located approximately 16 miles west of Blythe (California Department of Corrections 2001). These correctional facilities are located within the corporate boundaries of Blythe.

Imperial County, located to the south, was estimated by DOF to have a population of 149,000 as of January 1, 2001. By the year 2020, population in Imperial County is expected to reach 298,700, a substantial increase of 93 percent over the current population (EDD 2001a). Census 2000's redistricting data estimated Niland's population to be 1,143 (Bureau of the Census 2001). Historic and current population figures are provided in Table 3.8-1.

Table 3.8-2 provides the racial distribution for the State of California and Imperial and Riverside Counties, based on 2000 census data. Caucasians make up the largest racial group in Riverside County (65.6 percent), and the state (62.6 percent) as a whole. Hispanics and Latinos account for 36.2 percent of the population in Riverside County. In Imperial County, Caucasians account for 49.4 percent of the population, while Hispanics and Latinos account for 72.2 percent of the population. Since many Hispanic and Latino people also consider themselves to be Caucasian, depending on their ancestry, the two ethnic categories overlap and the sum of the two do not necessarily equal 100 percent.

<b>Table 3.8-2 Population and Ethnicity in the Project Area</b>			
	<b>Caucasian (percent of total)</b>	<b>Hispanic (percent of total)</b>	<b>Total population</b>
Palm Desert	86.8	17.1	41,155
Thousand Palms	74.8	43.6	5,120
Cathedral City	65.3	50.0	42,647
Riverside County	65.6	36.2	1,545,387
Imperial County	49.4	72.2	142,361

Source: 2000 Census-QT-P3.

The route of the Proposed Project would come within close proximity of residences in various communities within the project area. The closest residential areas are:

- Small residential communities in Desert Center and Chiriaco Summit along the I-10 segment of the route. These communities are north of I-10, while the transmission line route would be to the south of I-10.
- The community of Coachella along SR-111 to the southwest of the transmission line route.
- Residential development at Palm Desert, approximately 2 miles south of the Proposed Project route.
- Scattered rural residential development north of Ramon Road, located adjacent to the Proposed Project route and extending approximately 1.5 miles to the south.
- Scattered rural residential development north of the Proposed Project route just east of Thousand Palms.
- The Thousand Palms community located 2 miles south of the Proposed Project route.
- Cathedral City, 4 miles south of the Proposed Project route.
- The community of North Palm Springs, crossed at its northern edge by the Proposed Project route.

Table 3.8-2 summarizes ethnicity for the nearest communities. The overwhelming majority of the population of the area is Caucasian and/or Hispanic. Other races and ethnicities account for less than five percent of the population.

### 3.8.1.2 Housing

In general, housing will not be affected by the Proposed Project or alternatives. According to the DOF, on January 1, 2001 there were approximately 595,682 total housing units in Riverside County, with a vacancy rate of 13.4 percent. For the same period of time, the DOF estimated approximately 4,840 total housing units in Blythe, with a vacancy rate of 16.1 percent. Blythe was estimated to have a 14.2 percent rental vacancy rate in the 2000 Census; 788 were classified as vacant housing units, with an additional 256 housing units available for seasonal, recreational, or occasional uses (Bureau of the Census 2001a). The Blythe area has 23 motels with

approximately 1,100 rooms; over 300 mobile home spaces; an excess of 600 RV spaces; along with additional housing, condominiums and apartments that have been built since the State of California recently constructed two correctional facilities in the area (Blythe 2001).

The median price for a newly constructed home in Riverside County by the end of 2000 was \$248,156, and \$167,380 for an existing home. While housing prices in Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura Counties were increasing, many families moved to Riverside County to buy homes because of the availability of land at comparatively affordable prices and the rise of housing prices throughout the rest of the region (DOF 2001c).

Housing in Blythe is affordable with the average new home purchase price ranging from \$85,000 to \$95,000. Rental housing ranges from \$300 to \$550 per month for one or two-bedroom apartments. Two- and three-bedroom houses rent for \$450 to \$800 per month (Blythe 2001).

The DOF estimated there were 44,218 total housing units in Imperial County as of January 1, 2001, with a vacancy rate of 10.2 percent. The 2000 Census estimated the township of Niland's total housing units to be 530, with a rental vacancy rate of 26.6 percent. Of these, 108 were classified as vacant housing units, with an additional 28 housing units available for seasonal, recreational, or occasional uses (Bureau of the Census 2001c).

The median house price in Imperial County was approximately \$115,000 to \$118,000 in the year 2000 (Prince 2000). The median price of a home in Niland was reported to be \$43,300; rent rates for one and two bedroom houses and singlewide mobile homes ranged from \$175 to \$500 per month in 1998 (Valley of Imperial Development Alliance 1998).

### **3.8.1.3 Economy**

According to the EDD Labor Market Information Division's *Year 2000 County Snapshot for Riverside County*, in 1999 the civilian labor force was 687,800 with an unemployment rate of 5.5 percent, slightly above the state's unemployment rate of 5.2 percent.

The service industry was the largest industry in the County accounting for 27.5 percent of total employment, with health services being the largest component. Other significant industry sectors providing employment were retail trade (20.3 percent) and government (17.9 percent) (EDD 2001a).

According to the EDD *Year 2000 County Snapshot for Imperial County*, the 1999 annual average statistics showed the civilian labor force to be 55,800 with an unemployment rate of 23.2 percent, significantly higher than the state's rate of 5.2 percent. In fact, Imperial County had the highest unemployment rate in the state. The high rate was due, in part, to marked seasonal fluctuations in employment that are characteristic of the County's agricultural and tourism-based economy.

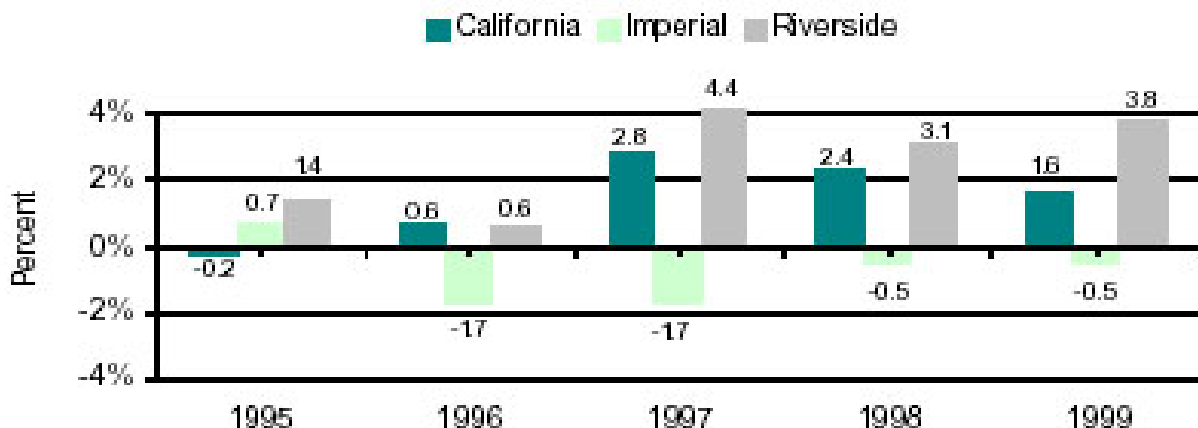
About one-fifth of Imperial County is irrigated for agricultural purposes, most notably in the central area known as the Imperial Valley, and agriculture is the dominant industry in the County. In 1999, it accounted for over 30 percent of all employment. Government, also a significant industry, accounted for a little over 28 percent with a majority of the employment in local government. Retail trade made up almost 15 percent of the total employment (EDD 2001a).

While there has been no recorded growth in the civilian labor force in Imperial County in recent years, there has been growth in non-farm wage and salary employment and the unemployment rate has been declining (EDD 2001b).

### 3.8.1.3.1 Labor Force

Riverside County's civilian labor force showed a 4.4 percent growth rate in 1997. From 1995 to 1999, the County's labor force increased by 12.4 percent compared to 7.6 percent for the State as shown in Figure 3.8-1. Imperial County recorded declines in the civilian labor force in four out of the last five years. The County is making an effort to diversify from an agricultural-based economy to a service-based economy, which would include manufacturing and technology services (EDD 2001a).

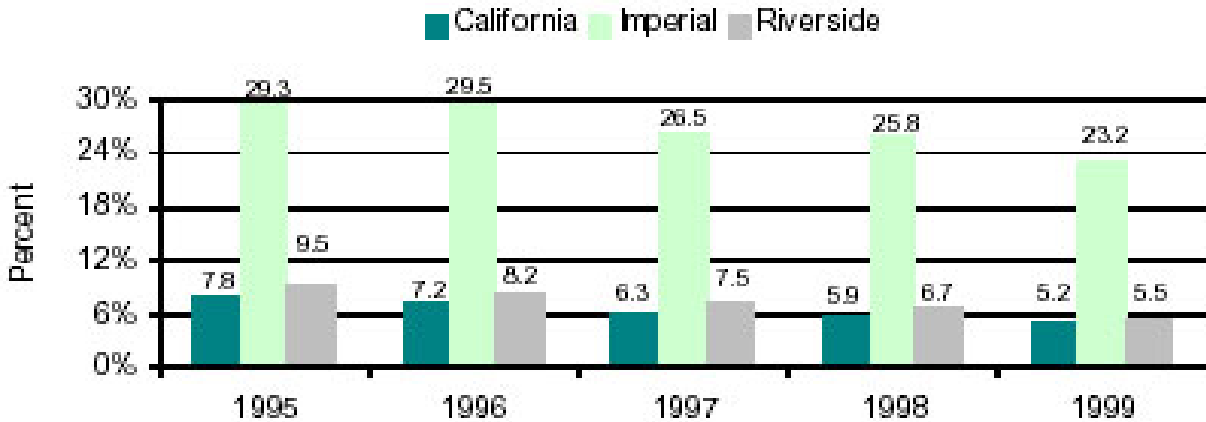
**Figure 3.8-1  
Percent Change of Labor Force for Riverside and Imperial Counties**



March 1999 Benchmark

While steadily declining since 1995, unemployment rates for Riverside County have consistently exceeded the unemployment rates for the State. In 1999, the unemployment rate in Riverside County was approximately 5.5 percent, versus 5.2 percent for the State as shown in Figure 3.8-2. Imperial County's annual average unemployment rate has consistently been the highest in the State. The 1999 recorded unemployment rate for Imperial County was 23.2 percent in 1999. Riverside County recorded declining rates over the years 1995 to 1999 (EDD 2001a).

**Figure 3.8-2**  
**Unemployment Rate for Riverside and Imperial Counties**

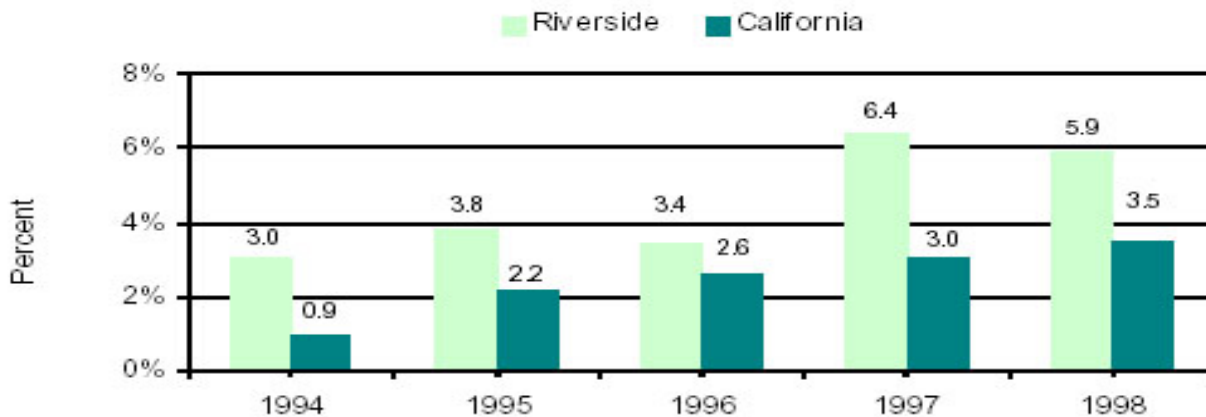


March 1999 Benchmark

### 3.8.1.3.2 Industry Employment

Riverside County nonagricultural wage and salary employment has shown strong growth since 1994. From 1994 to 1998, payroll employment grew by 68,000 jobs or 20.9 percent as shown in Figure 3.8-3. Services accounted for the greatest growth with a 23,800 increase over this period. Health services were the largest component in the services sector (EDD 2001a).

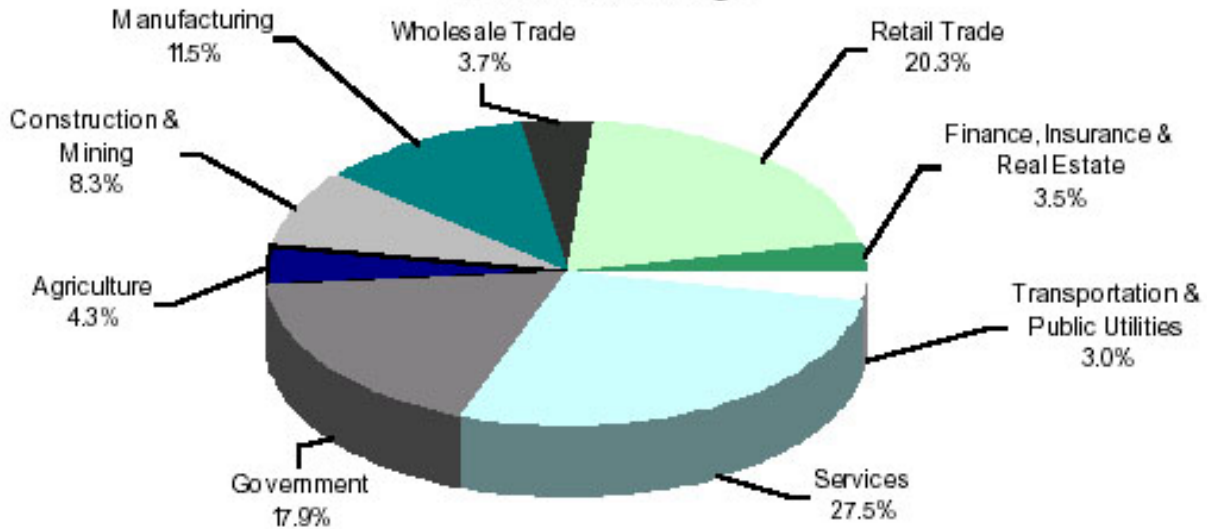
**Figure 3.8-3**  
**Percentage Change Total Non-farm Employment for Riverside County**



March 1998 Benchmark

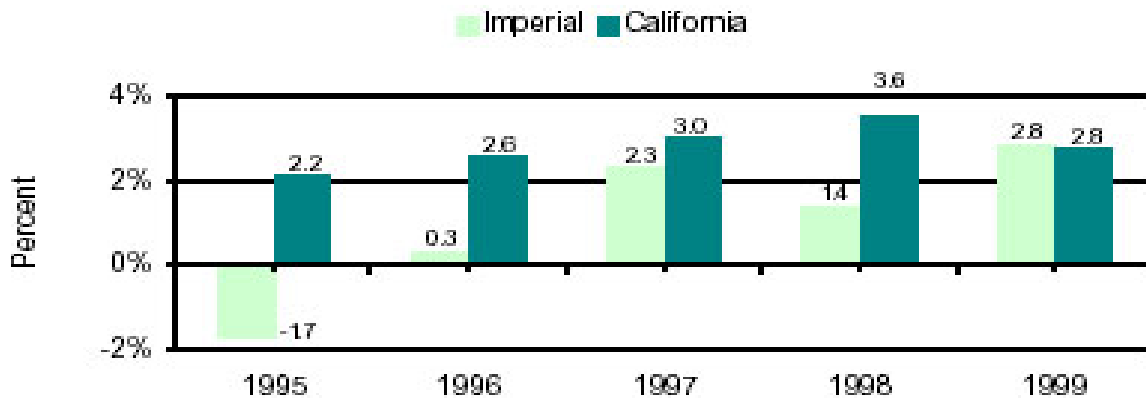
In 1998, services, retail trade, and government sectors dominated Riverside County's employment as shown in Figure 3.8-4. During the forecast period of 1995 to 2002, it is expected that 73.3 percent of the job growth in the County will continue to be in services, government, and retail trade.

**Figure 3.8-4  
Riverside County Employment by Industry  
1998 Annual Average**



From 1995 to 1999, Imperial County had cumulative growth in non-farm wage and salary employment of 2,400 jobs or 7.1 percent. The greatest growth, 3.6 percent, was recorded in 1998 and was due, in part, to gains in local government. In 1999, as shown in Figure 3.8-5, the County's rate of growth mirrored the State's rate at 2.8 percent (EDD 2001a).

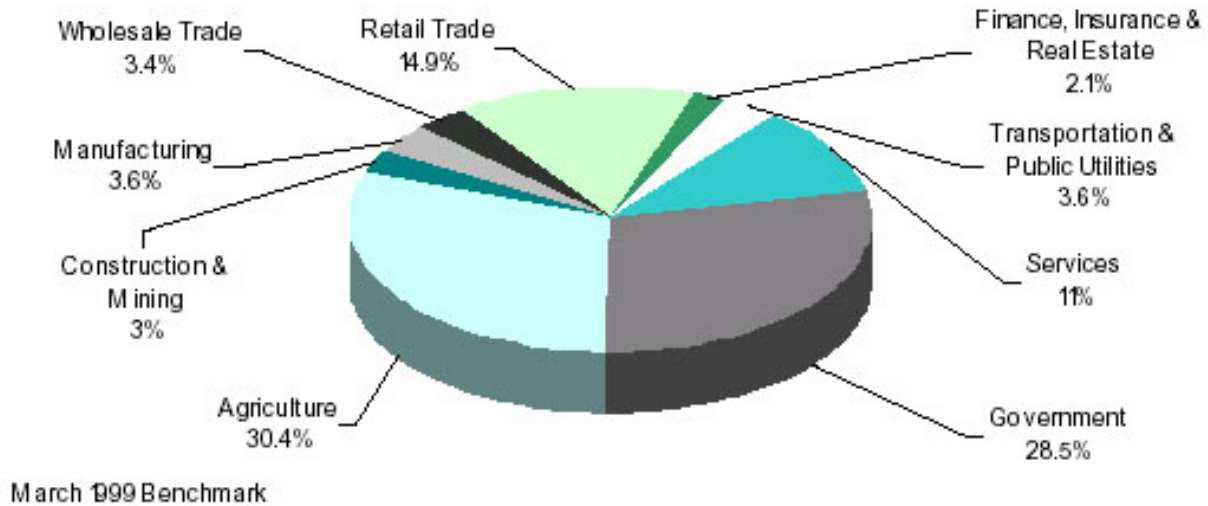
**Figure 3.8-5  
Percentage Change Total Non-farm Employment for Imperial County**



March 1999 Benchmark

As shown in Figure 3.8-6, in 1999, agriculture, government and retail trade dominated Imperial County's employment. Projections in non-farm employment indicated that by 2004, almost 70 percent of the job growth would be in retail trade, services and government industry (EDD 2001a).

**Figure 3.8-6**  
**Imperial County Employment by Industry**  
**1999 Annual Average**



### 3.8.1.3.3 Industry Trends and Outlook

EDD's *Industry Trends and Outlook, 1997-2004 for Riverside County*, predicts that non-farm employment will grow by 92,500 jobs, or 24.9 percent, over the forecast period. Employment gains are expected across all major industry sectors except mining, the County's smallest industry. The service producing industries are projected to grow by 66,700 jobs or 22.5 percent. Goods producing industries (construction, manufacturing and mining) would provide an additional 25,800 jobs, which translates to 34.9 percent. Industry employment projections for Imperial County indicate that most of the future non-farm wage and salary jobs will be in retail trade, services and government. Tables 3.8-3 and 3.8-4 show the skilled labor force in Riverside County and Imperial County for 1997 and a 2004 projection.

<b>Table 3.8-3</b>				
<b>Available Labor by Skill in Riverside County, 1997 to 2004</b>				
<b>Occupational Title</b>	<b>Annual Averages</b>		<b>Absolute Change</b>	<b>Percentage Change</b>
	<b>1997</b>	<b>2004</b>		
Carpenters	5,210	7,980	2,770	53.2
Masons and Related Workers	2,170	3,410	1,240	57.1
Welders and Cutters	740	990	250	33.8
Electricians and Technicians	430	580	150	34.9
Excavators	310	520	210	67.7
Graders	490	700	210	42.9
Industrial Truck Operators	1,030	1,330	300	29.1
Operating Engineers	630	880	250	39.7
Helpers, Labors	18,180	24,420	6,240	34.3
Administrative Services Manager	1,000	1,230	230	23.0
Engineers and Related Technicians	1,890	2,290	400	21.2

Source: EDD, 2001b.



**Table 3.8-4**  
**Available Labor by Skill in Imperial County, 1997 to 2004**

Occupational Title	Annual Averages		Absolute Change	Percentage Change
	1997	2004		
Carpenters	230	290	60	26.1
Masons and related workers	60	80	20	33.3
Painters and related workers	50	60	10	20.0
Metal Workers	80	100	20	25.0
Welders	70	80	10	14.3
Electricians	100	110	10	10.0
Excavators	20	30	10	50.0
Graders	40	50	10	25.0
Industrial Truck Operators	50	50	0	0.0
Operating Engineers	80	90	10	12.5
Helpers, Labors	1,610	1,750	140	8.7
Administrative Services Manager	80	80	0	0.0
Engineers and Related Technicians	140	160	20	14.3

Source: EDD, 2001b.

The Palo Verde Valley supports an economy comprised of a substantial agricultural sector and growing service and public sectors. Table 3.8-5 provides a list of the major employers within the Palo Verde Valley covering both manufacturing and non-manufacturing employment sectors. Blythe is a retail center for the region's agricultural production. Alfalfa is one of the top money crops within the Palo Verde Valley, producing about 41 percent of the Valley's total crop valuation (Blythe Area Chamber of Commerce 1998).

**Table 3.8-5**  
**City Of Blythe Manufacturing and Non-Manufacturing Employment\***

Name of Company	Employment	Product
<b>Manufacturing Employment</b>		
Morgan Corporation	232	Manufacturing
Hi-Value Processors	150	Vegetable Packing
Crawford & Associates	20	Ready-Mix Concrete/Concrete Blocks
Toshin Trading Company	19	Food Processor
Palo Verde Time	9	Newspaper
<b>Non-Manufacturing Employment</b>		
Ironwood State Prison	1,100	Level III Prison
Chuckwalla Valley State Prison	793	Level II Prison
Palo Verde Unified School District	450	Public School System
Palo Verde Hospital	135	Medical
County of Riverside	120	Public Administration
K-Mart	110	Retail
City of Blythe	101	Municipality
Albertsons	90	Supermarket
Palo Verde Irrigation District	81	Public Irrigation
Palo Verde Community College District	60	Community College
SoCalGas	18	Public Utility

Source: Blythe Chamber of Commerce 1998.

\*Includes Blythe and surrounding unincorporated community of Ripley.

The primary means of employment in the Niland area is agriculture (Bureau of the Census 2001c). Niland also provides retail services for recreational facilities at the Red Hill and Niland Marinas, and is located next to a known geothermal resource area. There are approximately 70 acres in the community area zoned for light and heavy industry and commercial uses, however, 75 percent of that is vacant (Valley of Imperial Development Alliance 1998).

#### **3.8.1.4 Government Finance**

County and cities receive revenues from a variety of sources including property, sales and franchise taxes; licenses and permits; fines and penalties; charges for use of service and property; and transfers from other governments.

Riverside County receives approximately \$1.5 billion each year in revenue. Of that total revenue, the Board of Supervisors has discretion over only \$236 million. The rest of the revenue must pay for mandatory programs such as health and welfare. The County receives 11 cents of each property tax dollar to fund County expenses, less than half of what it received before 1993. Riverside County spends approximately 65 percent of its discretionary revenues to support justice and law enforcement programs. To sustain these high priority services, the County has significantly cut many other programs.

The predominant economic base in Imperial County is agricultural. The agricultural industry is still a strong and viable industry producing a gross income of \$1,045,092,000 in 1999. Imperial County ranks as one of the top ten agricultural counties in the State. Other significant contributors to the local economy are government, geothermal electric power plants, state prisons, retail trade, and services. The County's future employment conditions will depend on several potential and on-going projects. These include the new industrial and commercial developments in the Gateway of America international border crossing, regional landfill, construction, geothermal industries, and expansion of the U.S. Plaster City Gypsum Plant. (sources: "Welcome to Imperial County", Imperial County Auditor/Controller; "Imperial County Overview", Imperial County Planning Department).

### **3.8.2 Socioeconomic and Environmental Justice Consequences and Mitigation**

#### **3.8.2.1 Introduction**

Potential socioeconomic consequences associated with the Proposed Project can be evaluated through comparison of project-related demands during construction with socioeconomic resources of the area. Construction of the proposed transmission line would create a modest number of new employment opportunities, with associated effects on population growth, housing, public services, utilities, and schools. Any increase in demand on the local labor market as a result of the Proposed Project would be temporary.

#### **3.8.2.2 Significance Criteria**

The Proposed Project or alternatives would have a significant impact if it:

- Induces substantial population growth or housing demand in an area, either directly or indirectly;

- Displaces or requires the relocation of a substantial number of existing residents;
- Generates demand for temporary housing of construction workers that exceeds the supply of local housing or hotel/motel facilities;
- Requires public service expenditures substantially greater than available approved revenue; and/or
- Disproportionately affects minority and/or low-income populations.

### **3.8.2.3 Proposed Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

Based on the significance criteria described above and the types of impacts expected to occur as a result of the project, the following is an assessment of socioeconomic impacts for the Proposed Project. Where impacts have been identified, mitigation measures that could reduce their severity are also presented.

**Socioeconomic Impact 1:** *Construction and operation of the Proposed Project would increase employment in the project area.*

It is estimated that the Proposed Project construction activities would last approximately 12 months. This schedule is based on a multiple-shift, 40-hour workweek. Overtime and shift work would be used to maintain or enhance the construction schedule. The total number of construction workers that would be employed by the project would range from 53 to 89, with an average of approximately 71 workers utilized over the life of the Proposed Project. Table 3.8-6 identifies the estimated construction workforce and timeline for the Proposed Project.

Construction and operation of the Proposed Project would not have a significant effect on employment in the overall project area as the number of project-related positions created would be negligible relative to the overall number of construction jobs in eastern Riverside County.

**Socioeconomic Impact 2:** *Construction and operation of the Proposed Project would increase the population in the project area.*

An average of 71 workers in any given month would be required for the completion of the Proposed Project. It is likely most of the contractor staff would temporarily relocate to the area during the construction period from outside the region. Construction of the Proposed Project would likely result in a short-term, minor increase in population within the project area. The addition of approximately 71 residents, even if some bring their families, would result in an insignificant temporary increase in population.

**Socioeconomic Impact 3:** *Construction and operation of the Proposed Project would increase the demand for housing in the project area.*

The Proposed Project could create a small, temporary increase in population in Blythe, the Coachella Valley, and/or Niland if the project resulted in the employment of contract construction workers from outside the region. Employment numbers, however, would fluctuate during construction, and not all workers would be seeking residences at one time. Workers would utilize motels or other local accommodations during their relatively brief stay in the area.

**Table 3.8-6**  
**Estimated Construction Staffing Timeline for the Proposed Project**  
**(Staff Required By Month After Notice To Proceed)**

<b>Craft</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
Surveying	9	9	9	5	5	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
Environmental Resource Surveys	10	10										
Environmental Resource Monitors (cultural resources and special status species)	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Access Layout	4	4										
Structure Sites Staking	8	8	8	8								
Hole Excavation and Foundation Installation	18	36	36	36	36	36	36	18				
Construction Yards and Material Staging	16	16	16	8								
Structure Assembly and Erection				24	24	24	24	24	24	24		
Shieldwire and Conductor Stringing								34	34	34	34	34
Landscape Rehabilitation											12	12
Total Manual Staff	12	24	24	28	24	24	24	28	16	16	18	18
Total Contractor Staff	59	65	51	59	47	45	43	55	49	49	35	35
Total Project Staff	71	89	75	87	71	69	67	83	65	65	53	53

The majority of the workforce would either live or be temporarily housed in Blythe, the Coachella Valley, or within a one-way commute time of approximately two hours from the Proposed Project construction activities. Riverside County had a housing vacancy rate of 13.4 percent in 2001. For the same period of time, the DOF estimated approximately 4,840 total housing units in Blythe, with a vacancy rate of 16.1 percent. The Blythe area has 23 motels with approximately 1,100 rooms; over 300 mobile home spaces; an excess of 600 RV spaces; and additional housing, condominiums and apartments. The Blythe area also has two large BLM-Long Term Visitors Areas, which can accommodate workers choosing to reside in RVs (Blythe Area Chamber of Commerce 2001). The Coachella Valley also has significant temporary accommodations that could be utilized by temporary construction workers. Imperial County had a vacancy rate of 10.2 percent as of January 1, 2001. The rental vacancy rate for Niland was 26.6 percent.

Seasonal fluctuations in employment are characteristic of Blythe and Niland's agricultural economies. The chance of a tight housing market during construction, if workers relocated to the area, would be lessened by past experience in the area and recent housing construction. Blythe has experienced large construction projects in the past, such as the two state prisons west of Blythe. During the construction of these projects there was a maximum of approximately 300 construction workers involved. There was no noticeable shortage of housing for these workers during construction.

Construction of the Proposed Project would cause no significant negative short-term impacts to the housing availability in the Blythe, or project area in general.

The operational phase of the Proposed Project would consist of limited monitoring and maintenance activities involving annual aerial and ground patrols. Existing or anticipated personnel at the Midway and Buck Boulevard Substations would conduct substation operations. It is expected that existing personnel would be utilized to conduct necessary transmission line monitoring and maintenance activities and no long-term increase in employment or resulting increase in housing demand would occur.

**Socioeconomic Impact 4:** *Construction of the Proposed Project would result in positive short-term impacts on the local economy in Riverside and Imperial Counties.*

The total constructed cost for the Proposed Project is expected to be approximately \$60 to \$65 million. The cost of materials and supplies is estimated to be approximately \$35 million. The estimated value of materials and supplies purchased locally is estimated to be between \$9 and \$10 million. The Palo Verde Valley would gain some economic benefit from expenditures for construction of the proposed transmission line. Economic gains would include spending as a direct result of locally purchased materials and supplies, and secondary gains as a result of employee payroll spending. Revenues to the local economy over the year 2004 are anticipated to be in excess of \$30 million.

Additional expenditures in the region would generate a temporary beneficial impact by creating the potential for other employment opportunities for local workers in other areas of service, transportation, wholesale and retail trades, entertainment and other business services. Local

spending would also occur with construction materials and services, providing an economic benefit to the region. In summary, construction of the Proposed Project would have short-term positive economic impacts, but would be less-than-significant in magnitude.

**Socioeconomic Impact 5:** *Construction of the Proposed Project would result in positive short-term impacts on fiscal resources of local governments in the project area.*

The Proposed Project should result in economic benefits for the affected area from increase sales taxes, and a higher employment base. The communities in the project area would also benefit from the economic activity generated by the purchase of services, manufactured goods and equipment from local businesses.

The majority of spending would be expected to occur in Riverside County. Spending on materials purchased within Riverside County would be subject to sales tax and a small percentage of these revenues would be distributed back to the local economy. A variety of other state and local tax payments and fees would be incurred with the transmission line construction, producing additional revenues to various agencies.

The initial impact on the local community would be from sales tax on equipment, material and supplies purchased during construction. Of the estimated \$35 million cost for material and supplies, approximately \$9 to \$10 million would be purchased locally.

Accordingly, construction of the Proposed Project would have a short-term positive fiscal impact on local governments in the project area.

**Socioeconomic Impact 6:** *Construction and operation of the Proposed Project would impact public facilities and services in the project area.*

In general, construction of the Proposed Project would not result in significant demands on public services or facilities. Response times to the site for emergency calls would vary as the Proposed Project proceeds along the transmission route. Emergency response times for law enforcement and fire protection are expected to be acceptable and provide adequate levels of service.

Project personnel would rely on both on-site fire protection resources and local fire protection services. On-site fire protection would be provided by on-site personnel and equipment (such as fire extinguishers, water trucks, and hand-held tools) to minimize the risk of project-related fires and, in case of fire, provide for immediate suppression within the construction area. In the event of a major fire in the Riverside County portion of the project area, local fire protection services could be called from the Blythe or Riverside County Fire Departments. The Niland Fire District would respond to fire emergencies in Imperial County up to the Riverside County line. The potential for large fires that would require the assistance of fire protection services is expected to be very low.

Emergency medical care is available in both the Riverside and Imperial County portions of the construction project. The Palo Verde Hospital is a 55-bed acute care facility serving Blythe and the surrounding Palo Verde Valley areas. Pioneer Memorial Hospital, a 99-bed acute care facility, would be utilized near Imperial County.

Hazardous wastes generated by the Proposed Project would be typical of modern construction operations and would be recycled or disposed of appropriately at permitted facilities. Waste lubricating oil would be recovered and recycled by a waste oil-recycling contractor. Used oil filters would be disposed of in a Class I landfill. No significant impacts related to hazardous wastes or disposal would be expected with transmission line construction.

With respect to sanitation, contractors would truck water for the Proposed Project to the site. Outhouses would be provided for construction personnel. Construction of the Proposed Project would make no significant demands on electricity, gas, or telephone services.

**Socioeconomic Impact 7:** *Potential environmental justice impacts associated with the Proposed Project.*

This report evaluated environmental justice issues associated with the Proposed Project in accordance with Executive Order 12898, *Federal Action to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*, published in the *Federal Register* (59 FR 7629). Executive Order 12898 provides that “each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations” (CEQ 2001).

Section 3.8.1.1 described race and ethnicity information for the entire project area. Current income information is not available. The areas located near the proposed and alternative transmission line routes are home to a large Hispanic and Latino population. Other races and ethnicities other than Caucasian are not significantly represented. Several Native American tribes and nations are located in the areas near the Proposed Project and alternative transmission line routes. Of these, the Torres Martinez Tribe, approximately 200 of whose members live on their reservation in the area, is estimated to have 50 percent of tribal members living below the poverty level. Two other tribes in the area, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, and the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians, own and operate significant commercial operations, including shopping centers and resorts.

Detailed analysis of income levels in the area would be necessary to determine if there was a population of low-income people potentially more affected by the project than other populations. However, the project itself would not have significant unmitigated impacts, and therefore, would not have disproportionate adverse environmental impacts on any population in the project area.

Since the Proposed Project or any of its alternatives would not have any significant impacts that would affect local populations in the project area, construction of the Proposed Project would not have a disproportionately adverse environmental justice impact on minority, low-income, or American Indian populations.

**3.8.2.4 Alternatives A, B, and C Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

Since the Proposed Project is very similar to all of the project alternatives with respect to employment, housing needs, and related socioeconomic impact issues, the discussion of socioeconomic impacts described for the Proposed Project applies to all project alternatives. Mitigation measures are expected to be sufficient to reduce potentially significant impacts to a less than significant level.

#### **3.8.2.5 No Project Alternative**

Under the No Project Alternative, neither the Proposed Project, nor Alternatives A, B, or C would be constructed. As a result, the socioeconomic impacts described above would not occur because there would be no construction workforce utilized and, therefore, no increase in employment, population, demand for housing, change in local economic conditions, fiscal impacts on local governments, or demand for public facilities and services.